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Memoirs of Magda Blaufeld Goldstein

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Memoirs of Magda Blaufeld Goldstein

To my daughters, Susan and Julie

Written in 1975

The recent interest in one's roots or family history has undoubtedly contributed to my desire to put the story of my life into writing.

I do not possess the perseverance or will power to uncover any particular dates of the origins of my family. I just want to write down the memories I have of my parents and the predominant events of my life and my husband's life.

I was born on March 11, 1920 in a small town called Nizny Verecky in Czechoslovakia. This little town is situated in the Carpathian Mountains, not far from the Polish border. Evidently, Verecky was a busy crossroads between Poland and Hungary when these parts of the country belonged to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, before World War I.

My parents came from Slovakia, which was also part of Austria-Hungary. My father, Henrik Blaufeld, was born in about 1876 in Sebes. This village was a few miles from Prešov, where my mother, Gizella Schwartz, was born in about 1886.

My father attended a Jewish elementary school, maintained by the local Jewish community. The formal education of most young Jewish boys, in those days, ended right there. My paternal grandfather was more of a scholar than a businessman, and barely eked out a living. However, my father had several older brothers who had immigrated to the United States before the turn of the century. With their support, he was able to enroll in the Gymnasium in Prešov. This Gymnasium was a very well-known high school in this part of Slovakia. It was run by Protestant clergymen and had a very high educational level. Eventually, my father entered law school. At that time, this was quite an accomplishment for a young Jewish man of such humble background. After finishing law school, my father worked for a lawyer in Beregszász. This was quite a lively town on the borderline of Carpathia and Hungary.

My mother also attended a Jewish elementary school. Opportunities in education for Jewish girls in those days were nil beyond the fourth grade. My mother's father had her enrolled for additional studies in a convent, in order to be able to finish the eighth grade. She was the only Jewish student in these classes. My grandfather's act raised some eyebrows among the members of the Jewish community. My mother did get a better education, and, a few years later, this became an accepted mode of schooling for young girls. My mother became a voracious reader and this way she became sort of self-taught. She was always interested in learning something new.

My parents were actually very closely related. My father was really my mother's uncle. Because of this very close relationship, they had to have special

permission from the Emperor in order to get married. Austria-Hungary, being a Catholic state, banned marriages between such close relatives. In later years, my brothers and I often talked about the document containing the signature of Emperor Franz Joseph. My father married his sister Regina's daughter, Gizella, in about 1904. After their marriage, they settled in Verecky, where my father opened a law office. It must have been quite an adjustment for them, living in such a rural area after Prešov, which was a beautiful city.

Despite the rural qualities of Verecky, life was quite *gemű tlich*. The few members of the intelligentsia, whether Jewish or gentile, maintained a close relationship. There were teas and formal dinner parties. There was an occasional trip to Budapest, which provided a welcome diversion. And so, a few years went by. Both of my brothers were born during this period. My brother, Béla, was born in 1907 and Martin (Marci) was born in 1911.

Unfortunately, this pleasant life was shattered by the outbreak of the First World War. My father, a great patriot, immediately enlisted in the army. He was sent to Poland and shortly afterwards, was captured by the Russians during the battle of Przemysl.

The Russians sent him to Irkutsk, in Siberia, where he spent the following four years. The hardships were many and the Siberian winters were a harsh reality. Luckily, for a while, he was in contact with his family in America and, through them, was able to notify my mother of his whereabouts. He received packages from America, containing some food and English language books. He learned English during these years. The POWs came from all over Europe and my father became very friendly with a particular gentleman from Holland. I do not know his name, but I know this person became very influential in my father's growing awareness of Zionism. He convinced my father that it was very important for the Jews to establish a homeland in Israel. My father later found out that this friend attended the first Zionist Congress after the war.

Unfortunately, I really don't know the exact story of my father's escape from Russia. I vaguely remember that he had to have several sets of ID papers in order to travel through the revolution-torn Russian countryside. It was a miracle that he survived the extreme cold of the Siberian winters and made it back home.

In the meantime, my mother and my two brothers and my father's youngest sister, Sally, had to flee from Verecky. My Aunt Sally had come to live with my parents after the death of my paternal grandparents. They returned to Prešov, and stayed there until the end of the war.

After my father came home, the family returned to Verecky, in an attempt to reestablish their lives there. Slovakia and Carpathia became part of Czechoslovakia. The postwar situation became increasingly difficult. Shortly after my birth in 1920, my father decided to immigrate to America and the family left Verecky for good.

We did visit Verecky several times during summer vacations in the following years. Aunt Sally had married in the meantime and remained there to live.

My father left for America alone in order to establish himself and the family was supposed to follow later. Unfortunately, this was never meant to be. My brother, Martin, became very ill at one point and was hospitalized for a couple of months. There must have been some other obstacles preventing my mother's departure. We lived with my maternal grandmother in Prešov during these years.

In the meantime, my father joined his brother, Maurice, in business in America. They owned and managed a tobacco store in Knoxville, Tennessee. My father really liked living in the United States, and was doing quite well. Unfortunately, he had not yet become a citizen of the United States when he returned to Europe in 1925. He came back to attend my brother Béla's graduation from the Gymnasium in Prešov, still hoping to take the family to America. I really don't know how or why he changed his mind and remained in Europe.

Czechoslovakia became quite a progressive country. Great strides were made in commerce and industry. Things were looking up again. So, in 1925 or 1926, my father reestablished his law office and the family moved from Prešov to Svalava (or Szolyva, the Hungarian name.)

I always had fond memories of Prešov and spent many a happy vacation there. My Aunt Frieda and Uncle Willie were always very affectionate and spoiled me when I visited there. Uncle Willie and I went for a long walk every Saturday morning. We explored every part of the city. There were many lovely buildings with gothic arches, which gave the city almost a medieval quality. The parks were full of flowers and the military band played every Sunday afternoon in the band shell. We continued these outings until my last visit there, sometime in 1941.

At that point in history, Slovakia, where Prešov was located, had a brief period of independence, and Svalava, in Carpathia, was occupied by the Hungarians. Anti-Semitism in Slovakia was rampant already. Most of the Jewish businesses were closed and the Jewish population suffered many indignities. When my last visit to Prešov ended, my closest relatives accompanied me to the railroad station to say goodbye. The train was moving out of the station, I was still waving to them, and suddenly I had this terrible premonition that I would never see them again.

When we first moved to Svalava in 1925 or 1926, life there was typical of any small town. Everybody was easygoing and friendly. It was a good place to grow up. My father was a very respected citizen. He was very kind and had a keen sense of justice. My mother was very generous and kindhearted, and was the patroness of many a poor family. She was a wonderful cook and made delicious pastries. When my father was in the United States, she had taken a course in pastry making. Later, she joined and became very involved in the WIZO, the

European Hadassah. Both of my parents were quite active in various Zionist organizations.

When my father resumed his legal practice, he was faced with learning a new language. Since Carpathia was part of Czechoslovakia at that time, the main language of the country was Czech. I remember my father studying Czech on many evenings. He finally mastered the language to the point that he could present his legal cases in Czech and could understand the necessary court proceedings.

My father loved to go fishing. Many times, I accompanied him on these outings. I played on the banks of the river, admiring the beautiful wildflowers and ferns growing in the tall grass.

In Svalava, I attended a Czech elementary school. I had lots of friends. Some of these friends survived the Holocaust and are scattered all over the world today. I still maintain a very close relationship with them.

For a few years, my family rented an apartment in a house in Svalava, owned by Joseph Goldstein. This is where I met the whole Goldstein family. Joseph was the second oldest of fourteen siblings. Three brothers lived in America and three had died in infancy. Joseph, his six other brothers and his only sister lived with their families in Svalava or the environs. Joseph's own family still lived in a small village called Izvor, which was the center of their lumber business. Their school age children attended school in Svalava and lived with a relative in a small apartment next to ours. Naturally, I became good friends with Joseph's children, including Klara, Irene, Manyi, and Sandor. There were ten children in this family. Quite a few other Goldstein relatives used to come for visits there. I even spent several short holidays with the Goldstein children in Izvor. So, I really knew the whole family since childhood. Subsequently, I met Louis Goldstein, who was Joseph's youngest brother and who later became my husband in 1942.

Both of my brothers studied at the university in Prague, by the late 1920's. Béla was in law school and, a few years later, Martin studied at the school of pharmacy. Both my brothers were quite a bit older than I was, and were always very protective of me. I felt like an only child during their absence. There was always a lot more excitement when they came home for vacations.

My brothers were quite different in nature. Béla was a lot more serious, and started to work in my father's office at an early age. Martin had a terrific sense of humor and could write very well. His letters home from school or university were always very funny. One time, his whole letter was written in verse.

The local WIZO usually organized performances for Hanukah and Purim. Martin used to write his own material to emcee these shows. The main entertainers were the members of the Birnbaum family, who all were very good singers. During Martin's years at the university, when he could not be home for these

performances, the Birnbaums would send him the planned program. Martin would prepare the emcee's monologue and mail it back for the show.

Martin also had a profound knowledge of mathematics. I still feel sorry that he never had the opportunity to come to America. What a career he could have had in computer sciences.

Svalava was a small town, nestled in the foothills of the Carpathian Mountains. The town was built along the banks of the Latorica River. The banks of the river became our favorite meeting place in the summer. Our summer vacations were spent swimming in the river or hiking in the mountains. There were frequent picnics in the woods or on a mountaintop with a breathtaking view. Everybody shared in the good food. There were many mineral springs in the mountains, and naturally, there were some small spas in the area.

In the wintertime, we went skating on the frozen river or went skiing. No sophisticated skiing equipment existed in those days. Sometimes even the skis were makeshift. You struggled up the mountain for half an hour, came down in a few seconds, and started all over again. It was all a lot of fun.

Sometime around 1930, we built and moved into our own house, which was much larger and much more comfortable than our previous lodgings. About two years later, my Uncle Maurice came to visit us from America.

In 1933, my Aunt Sally's husband, Franz, died suddenly. This, of course was a terrible blow to my aunt, but was a shock to my parents, as well. Uncle Franz was a boyhood friend of my father's and their relationship became even closer, after Franz married my father's youngest sister. Aunt Sally never had any children and moved to our house again. She proved to be a tower of strength to all of us in the later troublesome and tragic years.

I remember, when I was still a young teenager, going for a walk with my father one afternoon, on the main street of Svalava. We went past the house where our doctor lived. He was looking out the window and told us that he just heard on his radio, that Hitler was elected chancellor of Germany. As we walked further, I heard my father say that this means war. And how right he was.

Unfortunately, my father was a heavy smoker and, in 1934, he became very ill with lung cancer. After a year of suffering, he died, in April of 1935. It is hard to describe the sorrow and anguish of the following years. My mother became very sad and depressed. But, life went on as more ominous clouds gathered on the horizon.

In the meantime, my brother Béla was able to take over my father's law office. A couple of years later, he got married. Martin, after finishing college, had to complete his military service in the Czech army. He then worked as a pharmacist for several years. During these years, I attended the Hebrew

Gymnasium in Munkacs (Mukačevo), the region's largest commercial city, commuting there by train each day.

The political events of 1938 and 1939 signaled the tragic end of Czechoslovakia and so ended peace in Europe. On March 15, 1939, Hungary occupied Carpathia. The changeover to another government was smooth enough, but the illusion of wellbeing started to evaporate within a year. The Jewish people were the first to feel the wrath of the authorities. Nazism was in full bloom. The Hungarian leaders became willing allies of the Germans and became apt students of the Nazi suppressive methods. My mother had very bad forebodings of the future after the Hungarians occupied Carpathia. Shortly, after this she became very ill and died.

The death of my mother, in May 1939, was another tragic blow to all of us. Aunt Sally's quiet courage and inner resourcefulness were very helpful during this time of our personal tragedy. She took over our household and became our support. But life went on again. Because of my personal grief, events may have looked more ominous to me. I never ceased to envy the more carefree ways of my friends.

The Carpathian Jews managed to avoid some of the difficulties at the beginning of the Hungarian takeover. However, the political climate started to influence some social changes in our lives. Jews and gentiles gradually stopped mingling together, and other, more restrictive measures were imposed in our every day lives. For a while, we continued to promenade every Saturday afternoon on Main Street, greeting each other and exchanging news. Many a friendship started out this way. Actually, this was the time when my deepening friendship and romance with Louis Goldstein started. Louis owned a chocolate and candy store, and I used to walk up and down in front of the store in order to get his attention. I became friendly with Louis a few months before my mother's death. I remember my mother saying that Louis was the nicest young man in the Goldstein family. This really was a prediction.

Louis and I started to date quite often. While our relationship became quite serious, we did not discuss marriage for quite some time. The war escalated into a global affair. We would have liked to start a new life together, under happier circumstances, but peace kept on eluding us. A serious interruption occurred in our relationship, when all young Jewish men were conscripted into the Hungarian labor camps. They had to perform all kinds of manual labor for several weeks at a time. These stints of slave labor were repeated yearly, beginning in 1939.

The war was going on and on, and there did not seem to be an end in sight. Finally, Louis and I were married on March 29, 1942. Our happiness did not last too long. In December of the same year, Louis had to serve in the labor camp again. This time, however, he was sent to the Russian front. In January 1943, he was captured by the Russians and was sent to a POW camp, situated about 70 miles south of Moscow.

My brother, Martin, went through the same routine. He, too, had just gotten married and shortly afterwards had to leave his wife. Unfortunately, he perished somewhere on a frozen field, in the bitter cold of that fateful Russian winter.

I personally never heard from Louis after his capture. The wife of one of his fellow POWs did receive a note from her husband, in which Louis's name was mentioned. The card came from Russia through the Turkish Red Cross. At least I had a thread of hope that he was alive.

In the meantime, I managed to stay home with my brother Béla, his family, and Aunt Sally. However, things were getting worse and we kept asking ourselves, "How much worse can it get? How long can we hold out?" Aunt Sally kept on saying that all would be well as long as we could sleep in our own beds. This became a wishful prayer and proved to be prophetic words.

The fateful knock on the door came the day after Passover in 1944. We had to leave our house within two or three hours. Aunt Sally, my brother Béla, his wife and two children, and I were hurried out of the house. Bertha, my brother's secretary was with us, also. She had stayed with us for a few weeks, because she could not go home to her family anymore. The few measly belongings that we were permitted to take along seemed to weigh a ton after a few minutes walk. Since it was right after Passover, we didn't even have any bread to take along. The Hungarian police and army made sure we left all our valuables behind. The streets seemed to be deserted. Some soldiers were visible here and there. Only our dog ran after us, howling in bewilderment. He was captured by some soldiers.

"Where are we going? What's next? . . ." We were led into the local temple, where quite a few other families were congregated already. All the Goldsteins were there, among others. What was asked and what was said is irrelevant now. Fear was taking hold of us and the dreadful odyssey to the final tragedy had just begun. More Jewish families joined us during the night. Everybody was hoping for a miracle, that in the morning we would be set free.

In the morning, we were herded into cattle cars and taken to Munkacs. An old abandoned brick factory was converted into a detention camp, which was called "The Ghetto." We stayed there four long weeks. Our nerves were shattered, our physical strength diminished, we were humiliated. One night, before trying to fall asleep in our corner of the shack, I heard my little nephew say, "Am I not going to sleep in my little bed ever again?" I tried very hard to stifle my sobs.

After four weeks, the cattle cars appeared again. The cattle cars, the symbol of annihilation. After being shoved, pushed, and packed into the wagons, our journey continued for four days. Gloom and fear were our constant companions. What else awaited us?

In the evening of the fourth day, the train finally stopped and the doors opened. Where were we? Spotlights, noise, screaming, dogs barking . . . above all German commands. Who were these creatures in striped pajamas, trying to organize people into groups? I tried to carry one of my brother's children, but was shoved away and forced to march in another direction. The same thing happened to Bertha. The two of us found ourselves marching with a group of women, without realizing at first, that we were separated from the rest of the family. Then we noticed some strange fires burning all over. Everybody was asking the same question, "Where are our families?" We were reassured that we would see them the following day, that here, everybody had to work. But what was this building we had to enter? Fear and suspicion made the crowd balk and we refused to go in. During this twenty minute walk, we had seen all kinds of telltale signs and some people said that they had seen some bodies thrown into the fires. Well, we just stopped. After a few more harsh commands and even some shots in the air, we filed through the door. It was obvious that men and women were completely separated at this point. I was together with the other young women of Svalava. The place turned out to be a bath house. The attendants were a little more talkative, but confirmed our greatest fears. We were never going to see any other member of our family again, except the people in that room. The older members and children of our families were annihilated in the gas chambers. Frankly, I could not absorb the full extent of this information, and the final realization of this monstrous tragedy took a few days. I was too numb and too tired.

Anyway, with our clothes discarded and our heads shaven, we became mere numbers. Lost numbers at that. This was supposed to be Auschwitz. Did anybody in the world know where Auschwitz was, or that it even existed?

All of a sudden, there was some rumbling outside. It turned out to be an air raid. "Good," I thought to myself, "Maybe somebody will put us out of our misery."

A little while later, a large number of men were herded into the same room. Among them was my brother, Béla. Saying goodbye to him, at the end of the air raid, was the last time I saw him. He perished a few months later in Mauthausen.

After this incident, we were assigned a barrack and some bunk beds. Sleep was impossible, and there was not much left of the night. Five o'clock in the morning, we had to get up, file outside, and the daily ceremony of counting heads started. If the Capo in charge, who was an older prisoner, made a mistake, we could stand there for hours. This went on twice daily, just to make sure we were all there. As if somebody could escape beyond the electrified barbed wire, watch towers, guards with dogs, and guns.

For a few days, I was in absolute limbo. I had no sister or cousin or anybody to belong to. To be alone in a place like this could be disastrous. I could not even find a safe place to sleep. One day, I mentioned this predicament to Louis's niece, Irene Goldstein, who promptly invited me to join her and her sisters. They did not have much room on their bunk bed, but we managed. In retrospect, to

belong to a group and have mutual concerns became the major factor in survival. Irene's good-hearted offer really saved my life.

In the meantime, thousands of people kept on arriving daily. It was evident that all the Jews of Hungary were evacuated, and only the younger people were spared from the gas chambers. The monstrous tragedy was evolving in its full impact.

During the first week in camp, we were contacted by a distant cousin of the Goldsteins. She was evacuated from Bratislava, Slovakia, and was spending her fourth year in Auschwitz.

After a few days, we started to get our bearings and learned more about the camp. Most of the information was very grim. Two or three weeks must have elapsed and about 50 or 60 women from our group were formed into a work unit.

Each day, we walked about two miles into another part of the camp, called Brzezinka (also known as Birkenau.) Our work there consisted of separating and baling all the clothing discarded by the arriving throngs. This area was near the bathhouse of our first reception area. We had the privilege of the use of the showers daily, but unfortunately, we were next door to one of the buildings housing a gas chamber.

We walked to and from work for a while. Exiting each morning to the strains of an orchestra, under a banner proclaiming, "*Arbeit Macht Freiheit*," meaning, "Work Creates Freedom." What a farce. I still shudder at the thought of this.

After a while, we were moved closer to our work. By this time, we were tattooed, numbered, and all pertaining information about us was put on file. I guess the SS, in their German punctilious manner, had to have everything recorded in this death trap.

Our move to Brzezinka, the work area, had its advantages and disadvantages. First of all, most of our friends and relatives were included in this group. It was comforting to know that we had sort of a nucleus of people from Svalava around us. In Brzezinka, the matter of survival was eased somewhat for us. We were able to get hold of some extra food for a while. We also were able to pick up some extra clothing, besides the homespun shirt handed to us upon our arrival. But one of the crematoria was practically next door to us. It was early summer already. The weather being fairly warm, we used to stay outside occasionally, after roll call. So did the men who worked next door. We tried to talk to them occasionally, if unobserved. They did not say much, but the look of horror on their faces was indescribable. To be chosen to work in a crematorium was worse than death. One of Louis's nephews worked there and eventually perished with this crew.

In Auschwitz, of all places, the Yiddish language proved to be the most international. This was the language we spoke with all the Dutch, French, and Polish Jews.

Oddly enough, or should I say perversely enough, we had our moments of cultural enjoyment. Among these people of all nationalities, there were many artists. The camp orchestra came by to play a couple of times. And even in our own circle, there were people with different talents. My friend Leah lifted our spirits many a time with her singing and unparalleled sense of humor.

In the meantime, thousands and thousands of people went through the gates. Left or right, who shall live or who shall die . . . all according to the infamous Dr. Mengele. I don't know exactly when things started to slow down somewhat.

There were a few very tense days sometime in early September. We heard a lot of shooting and screaming one afternoon, and everybody ran for cover. The three Polish girls I was friendly with seemed very disturbed. Finally, they revealed that they had gotten some outside information about an attempted revolt in the camps. The timing may have coincided with the uprising in the Warsaw ghetto, but I am not sure of it now. They also expressed fears about our own survival in Brzezinka. According to their knowledge, all such groups as ours, working in close proximity to a gas chamber, had been annihilated in other camps. Things quieted down for a while and work went on as usual. The flow of people increased again. The last arrivals were some of the survivors of the Warsaw ghetto and the people from Theresienstadt, the remnants of the Jewish population of Bohemia.

Brzezinka, being quite a busy place, there were all kinds of commandos (crews) of workers coming and going. There were some men working in different capacities there. They all wore the striped pajama-like uniform. Finally, I met a girl from Prešov. This girl, of course, confirmed my fears, that all of my relatives had perished by this time.

Weeks went by, and summer turned into fall. We managed to figure out the dates of the High Holidays. We had a little prayer service with Leah singing some of the prayers. We even fasted on Yom Kippur.

Fall turned into winter. We were deathly afraid of the winter months. A possible illness was dangerous enough. Stories about the elimination of the sick and weary were told to us by some actual survivors of such "selections," as the Germans called them. The outlook was not good.

By January 1945, there were rumors about the evacuation of the entire camp. We did leave around the 15th of January. The Russian army had advanced so close to Auschwitz that the camp had to be abandoned. First, we walked for two days and two nights, through subzero temperatures. The frozen fields were strewn with dead bodies. The eerie nightmare continued.

Finally, we reached a railroad station and were loaded into open cattle cars. Fortunately, we were able to bring a couple of blankets along. The only way to withstand the cold was to huddle together and cover our heads with the blankets.

After two or three days on the train, we finally arrived at Ravensbrueck. If there was a worse hellhole than Auschwitz, this was it. There were unbelievably crowded conditions. Sanitary facilities were almost nil. The constant harassment was unbearable. We were lucky if we got our bread rations and managed to eat them, before they were stolen. The stench was suffocating. Luckily, we did not stay too long here. The cattle cars, symbols of our journey, appeared again.

Our next stop was Malchow, but not before a harrowing night in the railroad station at Magdeburg. This was quite a big and important railroad crossing. The night our train stopped there, it was bombed for about four hours. At first, I could hear all passengers and personnel being urged to rush into a bomb shelter. And we were sitting there in the open cattle cars, literally exposed. The bombs lit up the sky like a Christmas tree. I gazed into the sky, almost jubilant, that there were some people up there who were willing to put things right. The girls kept on pulling me down under the blanket, as if that would protect us. Miraculously, we survived the air raid.

In Malchow, we realized that we were separated from the larger group of our friends from Svalava. Malchow being a smaller camp, the treatment of the prisoners was not quite as harsh. We did not do any work here, but idleness was quite as damaging. We had no information of the outside world. Our existence here resembled life in a netherworld, finding comfort in recalling old times, peace, good food, etc.

A few weeks went by. The days grew longer and the sun was brighter. What next?

Well, we had to leave camp again, this time on foot. We wandered around for about two weeks, driven by the Nazi guards and surviving on very meager rations of bread. We slept in the open fields. We were very hungry and getting weaker by the day. But this time, the German population was on the move also. They were trying to escape from somewhere, but we could not figure out why. German army convoys kept on passing us by. One night, one of the trucks drove so close to us that one of our friends was killed. Another friend's leg was broken, and we alternated in supporting her in walking, thereafter.

Finally, one morning in May 1945, we realized that the Nazi guards had disappeared during the night. We were left abandoned, free at last, in the middle of nowhere. What now?

We came across an abandoned, bombed-out house. There were about 25 of us left in our group, all my husband's nieces and a few other women from Svalava. We considered the house as our headquarters for a while, but we needed some

food. We literally went out begging for food each day and everybody shared in these provisions.

I do not remember the name and exact location of this area. It was on the banks of the river Elbe. There were Americans on the other side of the river from where we were, but to our utter despair, they would not let us through to their side. We were unaware of the fact that by this time there were definite lines drawn up between the major occupational forces. Since our country of origin was outside of the American occupational sphere, the Americans did not want to have anything to do with us. Here we were, more helpless than ever.

After a few days, we learned about a refugee center being set up in a nearby town called Grimma, southeast of Leipzig. We decided to go there, since it was senseless to remain unprotected in this no man's land. This part of Germany was supposed to be occupied by Russia. The Russian troops had not moved in yet, luckily for us, because our subsequent return would have been entirely different. Now, we also understood why the German civilians were on the move. Most of them were trying to get to the American side.

The refugee shelter at Grimma was not too bad. There were hundreds of survivors of all nationalities at this camp. There was, at least, food available and some medical care. I don't even know who provided these facilities. It must have been the Red Cross. But we still did not know what our future was going to be. Some day, somehow, we would have to get back home.

This refugee shelter again housed people of different nationalities. There were many Czechs and quite a few of them came from Prague. We stayed here for a couple of weeks, still not knowing in what way we would ever return home. Well, one day, lo and behold, a lady from Prague drove into the shelter, in a chauffeur-driven car. She must have been quite an important person, because she possessed all the necessary clearance papers from the occupational authorities in order to be able to visit the occupied territories of Germany. She was looking for her brother, who was a political prisoner, somewhere in Germany. Anyway, she took a message from one of the women in the center, whose husband was in Prague. Two weeks later, the husband came to pick up his wife and with him came two buses, from the Czech Red Cross, to pick up other refugees. Finally, we were able to leave with this rescue party and, within two days, we crossed into Czechoslovakia.

The war was over by this time, and the ragged masses of refugees were on the move, on their way to repatriation. As we came nearer and nearer to Prague, everybody was in a jubilant mood, but I kept on having a sinking feeling about our return. Where were we really going? We knew there might be nobody waiting for us at the other end. But we were finally liberated and I could not help being elated at leaving so much tragedy behind.

It was the first week in May when we drove into Prague. The bus stopped at a crossroad and seemed to be stranded there for a while. Louis's nieces, Klara

and Irene, got out of the bus and almost immediately met a soldier from our hometown. After talking to him for few minutes, the guy said, "You know, your uncle, Ludvik Goldstein is here in Prague. He came with the Czech Legion from Russia." I could not believe this information. I could not move or even talk for quite some time, and I started to cry. The ultimate miracle had happened. My husband was alive! It was getting late, the bus moved on, and took us to a convent for the night, set up by the Catholic organization, Charitas.

At this time, Louis was an officer in the Czech army. About a year or more before, he had been able to join the Czechoslovak Legion and fought his way back to Prague. After the war ended, Louis met a friend of mine, who had already returned to Prague from concentration camp. She had seen me somewhere in the fields of Germany, and she told Louis that I was alive and would be coming back soon. Then, Louis began a vigil of the streets of Prague, hoping for my return.

I met Louis the day after we spent the night in the convent. We had to register at a refugee center in the morning. That was the place where our miraculous meeting took place. After almost three years, we were reunited. To this day, I am overcome with special emotions when I recall this unbelievable event. What a day that was.

Louis had some information about other surviving members of the family, who had passed through Prague earlier. His nephews, Nandor and Sandor, were in Budapest by this time. So, their sisters, Klara, Irene, and Manyi decided to join them there. Louis's niece, Lola, stayed with us. Louis, as a member of the armed forces, was entitled to an apartment. We were assigned a fairly nice apartment and we started to recreate our family life.

Many, many friends and relatives took refuge in our home, for some time, after returning from Germany. Luckily, the place had quite a few beds. Even so, one night, we had people sleeping on the floor. It was good to greet and help the survivors in any way we could.

Unfortunately, the political situation was not very conducive to our peace of mind. Louis's horrendous experiences in Russia left him very fearful about the future. I kept on recalling my family's fate, after my father failed to return to the United States. I did not have a soul left on my side of the family, and Louis' family had been terribly decimated. We decided to make one more change in our lives in order to be free, free from fear.

Since the British still occupied Palestine, we were convinced that we would not be able to reach Israel. We both had relatives in America and eventually received an affidavit to go to the USA. We left Prague in July 1946, and arrived in America on August 5, 1946, on a Swedish boat, the Gripsholm. Passing the Statue of Liberty, we finally arrived into a free land.

We managed to rebuild our lives and establish a family. We have two wonderful daughters and are very happy. Most of the young members of the family followed us here to America. I must say, I am very happy to be a member of the wonderful Goldstein family.

This is a free land, but we are not free from our memories. The recurring dreams reawaken the monstrous terror that possessed us for so many years. I wish I could say that it was just a terrible nightmare, but it was all true.